

CIVIL WAR SERVICE

DRAWER 2

LINCOLN CHILDREN - ROBERT

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The Lincoln Children

Robert Todd Lincoln

Civil War Service

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

— Robert Lincoln, son of the President, it is said
intends entering the army soon as an aid on the staff
of Gen. Grant.

1864 Trans. in
med. 2/15/65

ROBERT LINCOLN IN THE ARMY. Mr. Robert Lincoln, son of the President, was on Monday nominated to the Senate to be an Assistant Adjutant-General of volunteers, with the rank of Captain. He is to serve upon the staff of Lieut.-Gen. Grant.

Honest Old Abe.

Among the items in a publication which runs a column chronicling happenings of "fifty years ago today" appears one about Robert Todd Lincoln becoming a member of Gen. Grant's staff at City Point, February 23, 1865. This was the son of the President, a young man, freshly graduated from Harvard. He doubtless owed his appointment to his father's influence. In fact, his father could have commissioned him to any ordinary rank without provoking criticism or even attracting attention. But he chose a different method. He wrote a confidential letter to Gen. Grant, reciting the boy's history and his own anxiety to have him "see something of the war before it ends." The letter concluded: "Could he, without embarrassment to you, or detriment to the service, go into your military family with some nominal rank, I, and not the public, furnishing his necessary means? If not, say so without the least hesitation, because I am anxious and as deeply interested that you shall not be incumbered as you can be yourself."

Gen. Grant replied on the blank half of the president's letter, apologizing that he had no other paper available, granting the request and suggesting that the nominal rank be that of captain. He explained that he had three members of his staff of this rank, although they had seen considerable service. Young Lincoln served until the end of the war and had no little part in the formalities attending the closing scenes of the great struggle. The most interesting feature of the entire transaction is found in nine words in the Lincoln note which the careless reader may not have caught. They were: "I, and not the public, furnishing his necessary means." It is well to note Lincoln's conception of public duty. He naturally desired that his son should have a part in the closing scenes of the great war with which the father's name would be linked forever, but he refused to let the people's money be used in furtherance of this desire.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

1915

Lincoln and Nepotism.

Among the items in a publication which runs a column chronicling happenings of "fifty years ago to-day" appears one about Robert Todd Lincoln becoming a member of Gen. Grant's staff at City Point February 23, 1865. This was the son of the president, a young man, freshly graduated from Harvard. He doubtless owed his appointment to his father's influence. In fact, his father could have commissioned him to any ordinary rank without provoking criticism or even attracting attention. But he chose a different method. He wrote a confidential letter to Gen. Grant, reciting the boy's history and his own anxiety to have him "see something of the war before it ends." The letter concluded: "Could he, without embarrassment to you, or detriment to the service, go into your military family with some nominal rank, I, and not the public, furnishing his necessary means? If not, say so without the least hesitation, because I am anxious and as deeply interested that you shall not be incumbered as you can be yourself." 3. 2. 1815

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How strikingly does the conduct of Lincoln contrast with that of certain state officials of Missouri and certain prominent members of the General Assembly! On the fiftieth anniversary of Robert Lincoln's becoming an unsalaried member of Gen. Grant's staff, a Missouri senator expressed the wish that there were state jobs enough for all the sons and daughters of all the state officials. This conception of public office as a family snap is a far cry from the view of Lincoln. But doubtless there is no greater difference on this than on many other subjects.

Robert Todd Lincoln

UNTIL his death the other day probably millions of Americans did not know that Robert Todd Lincoln had lived among them. Other millions may have forgotten him, for he was the type of man who did not parade. Modest, reticent, as close friends have explained, he lived in fear of being accused of capitalizing his martyred father's greatness.

But Robert Lincoln, the oldest and last surviving member of Abraham Lincoln's immediate family, was a citizen of considerable importance on his own account. He had been a cabinet member, a diplomat, a successful lawyer, and later in life an industrial executive. He was a scholar, a student of public affairs and a man of creditable attainments.

The 60's are so far behind us that it seems almost incredible that Robert Lincoln was a young man in college when the war between the states was being fought. It was in the last year of the conflict, after Harvard had graduated him, that young Lincoln entered the service. The tormenting events of the period must have made deep impressions in his soul. Has he written about these things? Has he left the world a story of his father, an intimate story, such as only a son could write?

Fate was kind to Robert Todd Lincoln. He lived to ripe years. It was his splendid fortune to find the people exalting the memory of his father—loving him, as the blue army had loved him. He lived to hear civilization proclaim Abraham Lincoln sublimely great. In keeping out of the shadow of this greatness while making his own way, call it fearful reticence or modesty, Robert Lincoln did what his father before him would have done under like circumstances.

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"Our Country! In her intercourse with foreign nations may she always be in the right; but our country, right or wrong."
—Stephen Decatur.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE DRAFT—*An Editorial*

The recent death of Robert Lincoln calls to mind a significant happening of his early life.

Imagine, if you can, what would have happened in the United States in 1917 if the President had had a son twenty-two years of age who remained in college while millions of sons of other men were being drafted as cannon fodder. Then try to imagine

what would have followed had the President written to General Pershing asking him to find a nice safe staff job for the son.

Evidently times have changed, and our political and individual consciences have reached a higher plane. In 1865 President Abraham Lincoln wrote to General Grant, saying:

"My son, now in his twenty-second year, having graduated from Harvard, wishes to see something of the war before it ends. I do not wish to put him in the ranks, nor yet to give him a commission to which those who have served long are more entitled and better qualified to hold. Could he, without embarrassment to you or detriment to the service, go into your military family, with some nominal rank, I, and not the pub-



New York Herald-Tribune photo

The Lincoln family in 1865.

lic, furnishing the necessary means? If not, say so without hesitation."

General Grant evidently saw nothing wrong with the suggestion, as Robert Todd Lincoln was commissioned Captain on Grant's staff, was present at the surrender of Lee at Appomattox, and rode into Washington with the first definite news his father received of the collapse of the Confederacy.

The naive wording of Lincoln's letter shows he thought the request right and reasonable. He carefully avoids suggesting putting his son on the pay roll or giving him rank over others. His plain statement that he did not want the boy in the ranks reflects perhaps what the boy's mother had to say.

In 1865 the President's son was tacitly exempt from draft. While the President was summoning hundreds of thousands of other men's sons to face Southern bullets, and the people were singing "We are coming, Father Abraham," his own son was safe in cloistered Harvard. Oddly enough, there seems to have been no criticism, even from the parents of other boys.

J. P. Morgan, Elihu Root, thousands of sons of the prominent and the wealthy of the North, escaped the draft or hired substitutes to fight for them. There was some talk of injustice, but not much, except in a case such as that of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, the poet, in whose stead the gifted genius, Fitz-James O'Brien, went to war. O'Brien died from wounds in a hospital. Perhaps little would have been said, even then, had not Henry Clapp written: "Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who was shot through Fitz-James O'Brien's shoulder."

America's sense of duty to country is on a higher plane now. Contrast the letter of Lincoln with the actions of Theodore Roosevelt and his four sons, all of whom rushed to arms at first call. In the World War the sons of prominent and wealthy men were among the first to answer the call. The few cases of young men of that class striving to evade the draft or to find safety-first jobs aroused quick resentment. The war emptied the colleges before the draft came.

Fighting no longer is the job of the vassal or the mercenary. It is the business of the whole nation, rich and poor, and of women as well as men. Our Americanism and patriotism have improved, and our sense of political and national duty is higher than it was in Lincoln's day.

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
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THE PRESIDENT'S SON AND THE WAR

There has appeared at intervals in Lincoln Lore, monographs discussing current criticisms of Lincoln and his policies. No charge preferred against the President seems to have been so well supported as the allegation that "He kept his son out of the war for many months while other men's sons were giving their lives for the country." This attitude is so contradictory to Lincoln's very nature that one wonders just what did delay the military service of Lincoln's oldest boy.

A letter which Abraham Lincoln wrote to Grant on January 18, 1865, and Grant's reply serve as two of the most important exhibits relating to this question. They follow:

Lincoln's Letter to Grant, Jan. 19, 1865

"Please read and answer this letter as though I was not President, but only a friend. My son, now in his twenty-second year, having graduated at Harvard, wishes to see something of the war before it ends. I do not wish to put him in the ranks, nor yet to give him a commission, to which those who have already served long are better entitled and better qualified to hold. Could he, without embarrassment to you or detriment to the service, go into your military family with some nominal rank, I, and not the public furnishing his necessary means? If no, say so without the least hesitation, because I am as anxious and as deeply interested that you shall not be encumbered as you can be yourself."

Grant's Reply Dated Jan. 21, 1865

"Your favor of this date in relation to your son serving in some military capacity is received. I will be most happy to have him in my military family in the manner you propose. The nominal rank given him is immaterial, but I would suggest that of captain, as I have three staff-officers now, of considerable service, in no higher grade. Indeed, I have one officer with only the rank of lieutenant who has been in the service from the beginning of the war. This, however, will make no difference, and I would still say give the rank of captain.—Please excuse my writing on a half sheet. I have no resource but to take the blank half of your letter."

Besides these two letters we have another source of information which throws some light on the subject. Emilie Todd Helm, widow of the Confederate general, Ben Hardin Helm, spent about one week in the White House in the fall of 1863 and kept a diary which is invaluable. The editor of Lincoln Lore had the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Helm and feels the notes she made at the time of her visit to her sister, Mrs. Lincoln, can be accepted as absolutely reliable.

We are interested in the reactions of three people towards Robert Lincoln's military service—Robert himself, his father, and his mother.

The Boy

Robert Lincoln would have been an abnormal boy indeed if he had not wanted to enter the service at the first call for volunteers.

This excerpt from the diary of Emilie Helm made at the White House in November, 1863, reveals that he had been appealing to his parents to allow him to enlist:

"She (Mrs. Lincoln) is frightened about Robert going into the army. She said today to Brother Lincoln (I was reading in another part of the room but could not help overhearing the conversation): 'Of course, Mr. Lincoln, I know that Robert's plea to go into the army is manly and noble and I want him to go, but oh! I am so frightened he may never come back to us!'"

No one has ever questioned Robert Lincoln's bravery. When he was elected Supervisor in Chicago in 1876 and fought the "ringsters" of South Chicago his mettle was proven. The appointment as Secretary of War in two cabinets would hardly have been given to one who was a coward or a slacker. It appears that Robert Lincoln should be relieved from any accusation that might be placed against him for lack of patriotism, and it is significant to note that when he became of age he joined the service on

his own volition as indicated by the President's letter to Grant.

The Father

What was President Lincoln's attitude towards Robert's tardy military career? The critics have charged that the President kept him out of the service. In the diary of Mrs. Helm, President Lincoln appears in the role of a pleader for Robert in his desire to enter the army. Mrs. Helm says that when Mrs. Lincoln was worrying about her son not coming back if he enlisted, Mr. Lincoln said to his wife: "Many a poor mother, Mary, has had to make this sacrifice and has given up every son she had and lost them all."

Those who imply that there is impropriety in Lincoln's letter to Grant, a request for favoritism and an attempt to shield his son from danger, will not detect in Grant's reply any indication that the General so understood Lincoln.

Robert Lincoln was a man twenty-one years of age at the time this letter to Grant was written. He was a graduate of America's leading university at an early period when a very small percentage of American youths were sent to college. It appears that he was qualified to be something more than a private.

Cyrus Hamlin, son of the vice-president, entered the army from Colby University as a captain and aide-de-camp on the staff of General Fremont and Robert Lincoln was to become a captain on the staff of General Grant. One biographer has summarized his military history as follows:

"A subordinate staff appointment was given to Robert Lincoln as such appointments were given to hundreds of other bright young men and there all 'parental favoritism' terminated. He served until the end of the war. He was at the fall of Petersburg and also with the army in the pursuit and capture of Lee's army. He was at Appomattox when General Lee surrendered."

The Mother

Mrs. Lincoln's attitude towards Robert's enlistment is very clearly set forth in a statement which Emilie Helm set down in her diary on her memorable visit there in 1863.

While Mrs. Helm was visiting in the White House General Sickles and Senator Harris called. After they had made some remarks to the widow of the Confederate general about northern victories and had received from her a reply that angered them, according to Mrs. Helm's diary, "Senator Harris turned to Mrs. Lincoln abruptly and said: 'Why isn't Robert in the army? He is old enough and strong enough to serve his country. He should have gone to the front some time ago.' Sister Mary's face turned white as death and I saw that she was making a desperate effort at self-control. She bit her lip, but answered quietly, 'Robert is making his preparations now to enter the Army, Senator Harris; he is not a shirker as you seem to imply for he has been anxious to go for a long time. If fault there be, it is mine, I have insisted that he should stay in college a little longer as I think an educated man can serve his country with more intelligent purpose than an ignoramus.'"

This statement by Mrs. Lincoln supplemented by Mr. Lincoln's appeal on Robert's behalf, already mentioned, should allow the reader to conclude that Robert Lincoln was no slacker in spirit at least and that his father was no party in his failure to enter the service earlier in the war. Neither do we feel that Mrs. Lincoln, at this time on the verge of insanity, should be too severely criticised in the attitude she may have taken about her son's enlistment.

Mr. Lincoln told Emilie Helm in 1863: "I feel worried about Mary. Her nerves have gone to pieces; she cannot hide from me that the strain she has been under has been too much for her mental as well as her physical health." Mrs. Keckley, writing in 1862, said that Mrs. Lincoln's grieving over the death of her son, Willie, was so prolonged and profound that Mr. Lincoln once put his arm around her and, pointing towards a hospital for the insane which lay in view, remarked, "Mary, if you do not control yourself we will have to put you over there."

Emancipator's Letter Points Up Tragic Era

BY MALDEN JONES
Chicago American Staff Writer

In his lifetime Abraham Lincoln wrote some 6,000 "personal" letters—messages with a degree of depth seldom equalled by great public figures.

Some show the greatest delicacy in embarrassing situations.

*Yours truly,
A. Lincoln*

FAMILIAR signature closed gently pleading letter of President Lincoln to Gen. Grant.

Four years of civil conflict had taken a terrific toll. But Lincoln's first son had not yet marched off to war.

Until late in 1864, Robert Todd Lincoln had remained a student at Harvard University law school.

This was during the period when 40 of his classmates had left the campus for the front, and six had been killed.

On Jan. 19, 1865, Lincoln wrote the following letter to Gen. Grant:

"Please read and answer this letter as though I was not President. My son, now in his 22d year, having graduated from Harvard, wishes to see something of the war before it ends. I do not wish him put in the ranks, nor yet give him a commission, to which those who have already served long are better entitled, and better qualified to hold. Could he, without embarrassment to you, or detriment to the service, go into your military family with some nominal rank, I, and not the public furnishing his necessary means?"

"If no, say so without the least hesitation, because I am as anxious and as deeply interested that you should not be encumbered as you can be yourself."

When Grant received the

One such letter stands out, and it, sheds light on a tragic aspect of life in the Lincoln family near the end of the Civil War.

Central figures in the tale are Lincoln, his wife Mary Todd Lincoln, their eldest son Robert Todd Lincoln, and Gen. Ulysses S. Grant.

letter, he tore off the blank half of the page and replied thereon.

Not Typical

He said he would be "most happy to have him in my military family in the manner you propose," and suggested a commission as "assistant adjutant general of volunteers with the rank of captain."

Lincoln signed Robert's commission on Feb. 17, 1865.

Dr. Harry E. Pratt, Illinois state historian and an Lincoln scholar and author, characterizes the note as "one of the most un-Lincoln-like ever penned by the Civil War President during his stay in the White House."

He says the letter is more meaningful when considered in the light of circumstances.

Lincoln had endured painful abuse and criticism be-

Even as 1956 parents, facing the draft of their sons, President and Mrs. Lincoln faced the question of military service for their son. Here's how the Great Emancipator reacted in a little known story revolving around Robert Todd Lincoln.

cause Robert had not donned a uniform.

Evidence indicates Robert wanted to enter service early in the war. He was a little more than 17 when he went to Washington with his father in 1861.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great essayist, remarked it was a time when "scholars exchanged black coat for the blue."

Two Sons Lost

Mrs. Lincoln, a woman who spent an anguished life in the executive mansion, apparently was terrified at the thought of Robert in military service.

At that point in her life she already had lost two sons and could see her husband's own strength beginning to falter. Lincoln was reported to be 30 pounds underweight shortly before his death.

Edward Baker Lincoln had died in Springfield in 1850 in his third year. Eleven-year-old William Lincoln had succumbed in the White House in February, 1862.

Only Robert and his younger brother Thomas, nicknamed "Tad," remained.

Lost One Son

Once Mrs. Lincoln told White House seamstress Elizabeth Keckley:

"We have lost one son, and his loss is as much as I can bear."

Mrs. Lincoln's sister, Emilie Todd Helm, widow of

a Confederate officer, whom Lincoln invited to stay on at the White House with her sister in the face of criticism, recorded in her diary that she had overheard the President and his wife discuss Army service for Robert.

When Mrs. Lincoln said she was "so frightened he may never come back to us!" Lincoln replied:

"Many a poor mother, Mary, has had to make this sacrifice and has given up every son she has had and lost them all!"

4-Month Service

Robert Todd Lincoln served four months in the war on Grant's staff.

Gen. Horace Porter, who observed him at close range, said he "had inherited many of the genial traits of his father and entered heartily into all social pastimes. He was always ready to perform his share of hard work and never expected to be treated differently from any other officer on account of his being the son of the Chief Executive of the nation."

Abraham Lincoln's surviv-

Executive Mansion.

Washington, Jan. 19, 1865

Lieut. General Grant:

Please read and answer this letter as though I was not President, but only a friend. My son, now in his twenty-second year, having graduated at Harvard wishes to see something of the war

BEGINNING of "most un-Lincoln-like" letter Civil War President ever wrote re-

flects anguish and despair in Lincoln household at the time.



FAMILY PORTRAIT of the Lincolns shows Robert Todd attired in Union Army uniform with captain's bars, standing behind father and mother. Brother Thomas (Tad) is standing at right. Portrait in background is of William—"Willie"—whose death in the White House in 1862 was another one of the tragedies that beset the Lincolns.

ing son lived in the overpowering shadow of his father's greatness. His life was also touched repeatedly by sorrow and strange fate.

He sheltered and cared for his mother in the post-war era when she was distressed and unbalanced.

He attended "Tad" in the illness preceding his death in 1871.

In succeeding years Robert Todd Lincoln became secretary of war in the cabinet

of President Garfield and later served as minister to Great Britain under President Benjamin Harrison.

In 1893 he joined the legal staff of the Pullman Car Co. in Chicago, rising to chief counsel.

From 1897 to 1911 he served as company president and remained on the board of directors until 1921.

Robert was in the White House seven blocks distant from the Ford Theater on the night of April 14, 1865, when his father was assassinated. He rushed to the Peterson house to comfort his mother in the night-long vigil that followed.

He was in a party with President James A. Garfield when the latter was struck down by an assassin in the Washington railway station July 2, 1881.

He was with a group of official guests in the entourage of President McKinley when that chief executive was fatally wounded by a fanatic.

Brush With Fate

Another brush with fate occurred during the Civil War on the platform of a crowded Jersey City railroad, an incident he recounted with awe and gratitude in later years.

He had been pushed against the side of a train which began to move out of the station and was thrown off balance. He fell in the space beneath a car, and suddenly was yanked to safety by two strong arms that reached out for him.

He looked up at his rescuer who turned out to be Edwin Booth, the great Shakespearean actor and brother of John Wilkes Booth, the man who assassinated Lincoln.

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THE CAPTAIN LINCOLN EPISODE

When one hears of an individual apparently acting "out of character" it is always important to discover first of all if the reported statements of his behavior are correct and if so, whether or not the motives which are reported to have prompted the unusual procedure have been carefully scrutinized.

Jim Bishop in his recent book "The Day Lincoln Was Shot" ignores the time element with which he is dealing in the second chapter designated as "8 a.m." to go back and pick up an incident which occurred several months before relating to the Lincoln family's attitude towards Robert, the oldest son, joining the army. Bishop states that after the family had discussed the matter, Mr. Lincoln did something that "for him, was mean. He asked General Grant to give the boy a commission and place him on his personal staff." Bishop then goes on to conclude that the inference was that the President "did not want his son to be in danger."

Although the President has been severely criticized by many authors who have felt he was somewhat "out of character" in this procedure it has not heretofore been affirmed that he was "mean" about it.

Robert Lincoln entered Harvard College in the fall of 1860 and was still a freshman, eighteen years of age, when the first call for volunteers was made in April 1861. The great numbers of men who enlisted during the summer seemed to fill the ranks and Robert started in his sophomore year in the fall. Early in the spring, however, he apparently got the war fever and acquired a book entitled *Cadet Life at West Point* in which he wrote on the flyleaf "R. T. Lincoln, Harvard College, March 1862." The back of the front cover of the book now in the Foundation library bears a book plate of Robert's father-in-law, W. A. Harlan. A month before Robert had acquired this book his brother, William, died in the White House. The mental anguish of his parents at this time would cut short any enlistment plans and he finished his sophomore year while yet in his teens.

The junior year at Harvard began before the draft act was confirmed, but now with its passing Robert had a new argument to warrant his enlistment. Apparently, however, the suggestion that he should finish college took root about this time and he returned to college as a senior in the fall of 1863. Apparently Robert was getting insistent about entering the army, but his mother had not been willing to acquiesce. Emily Todd Helm recorded in her diary while in the White House in November 1863 that Mary was frightened about Robert enlisting. Emily recorded this conversation between Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln:

"Of course Mr. Lincoln I know that Robert's plea to go into the Army is manly and noble and I want him to go, but oh! I am so frightened that he may never come back to us." Mrs. Helm then states Lincoln replied, "Many a poor mother, Mary has had to make this sacrifice and has given up every son she had—and lost them all."

Robert Lincoln's entry into the army at any time in 1864 with the Union party convention on June 7 and the election of December 8 coming up would have been unwise. While Robert may have been a "political liability" out of the army, the President would have no part in an enlistment which would be construed by his opponents as a political maneuver to gain votes. This situation may have been partly responsible for Robert remaining to graduate.

At this point we may pick up the story from a letter written by Robert Lincoln on March 2nd, 1915 to Winfield M. Thompson. Referring to his father, Robert wrote:

"At the end of the vacation after my graduation from Harvard, I said to him that as he did not wish me to go into the army (his reason having been that something might happen to me that would cause him more official embarrassment than could be offset by any possible value of my military service). I was going back to Cambridge to enter Law School. He said he thought I was right."

Robert entered Harvard Law School on September 5, 1864. The election was over on November 8 and when Robert came home in January 1865 the old question of entering the army came up again. In another paragraph in the letter to Thompson, Robert wrote, still referring to his father: "His letter afterwards to General Grant was the result of my renewed appeal to him."

In this letter to Grant dated January 19, 1865 making known Robert's wish to enter the army the President wrote: "I do not wish to put him in the ranks, nor yet to give him a commission . . . could he without embarrassment to you or detriment to the service go into your Military family with nominal rank, I and not the public furnishing his necessary means." Both the salutation and conclusion of the letter were in apologetic terms and left the matter entirely to Gen. Grant. Grant replied on January 21: "I will be most happy to have him in my Military family in the manner you propose. The nominal rank given is immaterial, but I would suggest that of Capt."

The most important part of Robert Lincoln's letter to Winfield M. Thompson is the sentence within the brackets which were placed there by Robert himself. The statement sets forth the primary reason why the oldest son of the President did not enter the army until near its close and even then was kept from the ranks. Robert clearly states, and he should know the facts, that his failure to enter the army was primarily due to his father's fear of "official embarrassment" which might accrue from Robert's entering the military service.

It is not difficult to visualize several situations in which Robert might have become involved, either through natural procedures or premeditated situations purposely created by Lincoln's enemies. He wrote on one occasion, "But I have bad men also to deal with, both north and south. . . . I intend keeping my eye on these gentlemen, and to not unnecessarily put any weapons in their hands."

The plans which had been made by corrupt politicians to strike at the President by attempting to compromise his wife would not be soon forgotten and he did not intend to make his son available for ulterior purposes. Even after Robert had been allowed to join the army and was proceeding to his appointment Lincoln apparently became worried and observed in a telegram to Grant: "I have not heard of my son's reaching you." Grant replied immediately and assured the President that his son had arrived.

Mr. Lincoln has been accused of shielding his son from dangers prevalent to warfare, bowing to the pleadings of his mentally ill wife, or relieving himself from sorrow should his son become a casualty. The President's dread of interference with his official duties or contemplated embarrassment to the administration was the fundamental consideration. The great task in which he was engaged, superseded any selfish purpose in his attitude towards his son's enlistment.

Abraham Lincoln may not have been "out of character" after all in this much discussed episode. Certainly he was not "mean" in his request to General Grant and very conscientious about not allowing barriers to obstruct his own task as President of the nation and as commander-in-chief of the armies of the republic.

Lincoln Sought Safe Civil War Haven for His Oldest Son

By WOLFGANG SAXON

Reasons abound for the powerful and the not so powerful to seek haven for themselves or their sons in time of war.

President Lincoln's reason, for instance, was grave concern for Mary Todd Lincoln's mental state in the event that their first-born was harmed. Grover Cleveland hired a substitute to stand in for him in the Civil War, when as a young lawyer he was trying to support a family.

The second of the Lincolns' four sons, Edward, died before he reached school age. When their oldest, Robert Todd Lincoln, graduated from Harvard in 1864, his mother lived in fear for his life and insisted that he be hidden away in Harvard Law School.

Bob Lincoln obeyed, but both he and the President agonized over the thought of untold numbers of Americans drafted into the nation's armies and dying in battle. Although the younger Lincoln was engaged to be married, he wanted to be in uniform; his father worked out a compromise that allayed Mary Lincoln's worst fears.

A Letter to Grant

Lincoln wrote to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant in January 1865. He implored Grant to take it as a letter from a friend rather than the President and to use his own judgment as to what was best for all concerned, according to "Red River to Appomattox," the third volume in Shelby Foote's trilogy "The Civil War, a Narrative," published by Random House.

"My son, now in his twenty-second year, having graduated from Harvard, wishes to see something of the war before it ends," Lincoln wrote. "I do not wish to put him in the ranks, nor give him a commission to which those who have already served long are better entitled, and better qualified to hold.

"Could he, without embarrassment to you or detriment to the service, go into your military family with some nominal rank, I, and not the public, furnishing his necessary means? If no, say so without the least hesitation, because I am as anxious, and as deeply interested that you shall not be encumbered, as you can be yourself."

Grant replied that he would be glad to put the young man on his staff as an assistant adjutant. Bob Lincoln reported the following month at City Point, Grant's base of operations in Hopewell, Va., sporting a captain's bars and paid by the Army.

Young Lincoln saw some limited campaigning in the short time that remained before the surrender at Appomattox in early April. He reentered Harvard Law, became a corporation lawyer and served as



Robert Todd Lincoln, the son of President Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln sheltered him from Civil War combat.

Secretary of War in the 1880's and as Minister to Britain after that. He died in 1926.

Cleveland's Substitute

Then there was Stephen Grover Cleveland, a young Buffalo lawyer, who lived to become a Tammany-bashing prosecutor, Mayor and the only President of the United States ever elected to two nonconsecutive terms. In 1863, he was barely getting his legal and political career on track as an assistant district attorney for Erie County. His name was one of the first drawn in Buffalo under the Conscription Act enacted in March that year.

The early death of Cleveland's father, a clergyman, had left the family in some difficulties, and young Stephen — he dropped the first name later — had been left to fend for himself at the age of 16. He was assisting his mother and siblings as much as he could and, when he was drafted, paid \$150 for a 32-year-old Polish immigrant to take his place so he might continue his support.

His failure to serve later turned into a political handicap, but he did help two of his brothers to join the service.

During the Civil War, thousands of American men did what others would do again a century later: they fled to Canada. Those looking for a legal way could choose to commute — in effect, buy their way out — which cost them \$300, or find a substitute.

The commutation clause was repealed by Congress in July 1864 after an angry campaign against the "rich man's war, poor man's fight." By then, 18,197 New Yorkers had bought their freedom in that fashion.



